

Columns | updated: 2/13/2017 9:38 AM

What the numbers reveal about suburban commutes



The Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning is dissecting travel trends to shine a light on traffic and other problems.

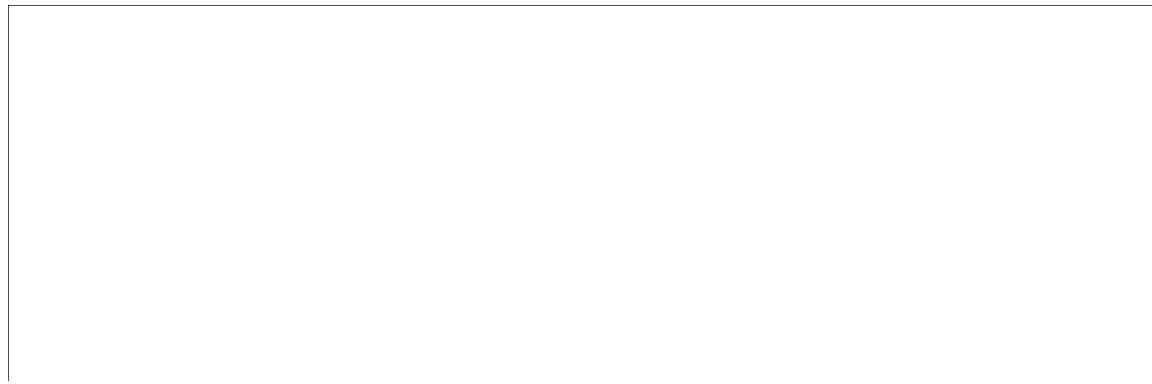
Daily Herald File Photo



Marni Pyke

If you're almost home but still inching along in traffic at 6 p.m., don't blame the other working stiffs.

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The local gridlock is just as likely caused by parents who are ferrying kids to basketball practice, running errands or eating out, a Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning analysis shows.

Here are some other facts CMAP analysts hope will illuminate what's wrong and right with travel trends in the region:

- Black commuters in the suburbs and Chicago spend six minutes longer getting to their jobs than whites.
- McHenry County has the highest percentage of people driving solo to work and back; Kane County has the highest percentage of carpoolers.
- Rosemont households own fewer vehicles (1.37) on average than families in West Chicago or Lake in the Hills, who typically own two. Long Grove is on top with 2.47.
- Lake County not only talks the talk, but 3 percent of its population walks to work. That trumps the other collar counties and suburban Cook, although Chicago takes the shoe leather crown with 6.7 percent.

Crunching the numbers will help solve congestion problems and transit deserts as CMAP prepares a comprehensive plan for the region stretching to 2050.

"It's important to start with where people are and where they want to go and build a system that works for them," associate transportation planner Elizabeth Irvin said.

For a visual look at travel patterns, CMAP has an interactive [Day in the Life of the Regional Transportation System](http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/onto2050/snapshot-reports/transportation-network/travel-trends/trips-by-time-of-day) (<http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/onto2050/snapshot-reports/transportation-network/travel-trends/trips-by-time-of-day>) map available at www.cmap.illinois.gov (<http://www.cmap.illinois.gov/>).

Here's what you probably know already: More Chicagoans take the bus or subway than suburbanites.

Here's what you may not know: DuPage County has the highest percentage of residents (5.7 percent) using Metra. DuPage beat out suburban Cook (4.6 percent), even though Cook has more rail lines.

"How do we provide more options for people?" will be a central question for planners as they formulate a 2050 vision, Irvin said.

Another problem for planners is racial disparities, a finding that "jumped out to me," Irvin said.

Using U.S. census data, planners found that 72.7 percent of whites drive to work alone compared to 66 percent of Hispanics, 64 percent of Asians and 62 percent of blacks. Hispanic drivers had the highest rate of carpooling at 15 percent, and black commuters were most likely to use public transit at 22 percent.

A one-way commute for white or Hispanic workers was 29 minutes compared to 31 minutes for Asians and 35 for blacks.

One reason may be that 20 percent of blacks in the region live without access to nearby CTA or Metra stations, planners said.

"We have to work on issues of access and reinvestment in disinvested neighborhoods," Irvin said.

The statistics also undercut some assumptions about commuting and can provide some useful tips to avoid traffic.

During the morning rush at 8 a.m., 39 percent of trips in the region were to jobs, 21 percent were school-related and 34 percent fell into an "other" category. Those include shopping, errands, recreation or personal business.

But by 5 p.m., that "other" category surged by 33 percent. That means instead of going straight home, thousands more vehicles are on the roads during the evening rush headed to a variety of destinations or making multiple stops.

What else? People in Spring Grove have some of the longest commutes, traveling an average 85 miles daily. In contrast, Lombardians drive about 47 miles. To find out more about CMAP's travel trends data or 2050 plan, go to www.cmap.illinois.gov or cmap.is/TravelSnap.

One more thing

Saving seats may work in grade school but not on Metra cars, commuters agreed.

The commuter railroad released the results of its latest rider survey Monday and found that "rowdy groups, savings seats and hands-free coughing and sneezing" were the most popular unpopular behaviors.

The study is part of Metra's "Ride Nice" campaign that encourages civil behavior on trains with educational posters.

Other pet peeves included snoring and talking on Quiet Cars.



The CTA is planning a new Green Line station near the United Center to close a 1½-mile gap, officials said. It'll be open around 2020. -

CTA news

Come 2020, the Chicago Transit Authority expects to open a new Green Line station near the United Center. Located at Lake Street and Damen Avenue, the station fills in a 1½-mile gap, officials said. Design work will start this summer; construction should begin in fall 2018 and take two years.